B'desh accuses India of huge power overpricing

DHAKA: A Bangladesh government committee said on Monday it had found "egregious anomalies" in a billion-dollar cross-border electricity supply deal with Indian conglomerate Adani, providing around 10 per cent of the country's power.

Dhaka's review committee on power deals is investigating contracts agreed during the now-ousted government of Sheikh Hasina.

Relations between Bangladesh and neighbouring India have soured since Hasina's ouster.

The review committee on power purchase agreements said it had found "examples of egregious anomalies", that meant the state-owned Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) was paying up to 50 per cent more than it should.

"These wrong decisions are not mistakes," the report said.

"They suggest systematic collusion between businesses, politicians and bureaucrats to award overpriced and unnecessary contracts in order to deliberately create huge excess profits that are then shared between these parties." Adani's coal-fired Godda plant in India's Jharkhand state - a $2 billion project including transmission lines that opened in 2024 - supplies between seven and 10 per cent of Bangladesh's baseload power demand of 13GW for its 170 million people.

"For the Adani Godda imported power contract, we conservatively estimate overpricing of 4-5 cents per kilowatt hour, which means the price being paid is roughly 50 per cent higher than what it should be," the report said.

Bangladesh pays Adani $1 billion annually under the 25-year contract. The report said Bangladesh suffered losses of $4.13 billion in 2024-25.

Adani Power said it had not seen the report, but added it supplied "amongst the most competitively priced" power and demanded Dhaka now pay up the cash it owes it for the energy it had supplied.

"We have continued to honour our supply commitment despite large receivables, when many other generators have cut back or even stopped supplies," the spokesman said.

"We urge Bangladesh government to liquidate our dues at the earliest as this is impacting our operations."

The Dhaka committee said it was "essential" for contracts to be examined.—AFP

Death sentence for Dhaka's ex-police chief

DHAKA: A Bangladesh court on Monday sentenced Dhaka's fugitive former police chief and two senior colleagues to be hanged for "crimes against humanity" committed during the rule of ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

All three, including the capital's former police chief, Habibur Rahman, were tried in absentia, and their whereabouts are not known.

Five other ex-police officers were sentenced to varying terms.

The case concerned the killing of six protesters in Dhaka on Aug 5, 2024, the day Sheikh Hasina fled to India as protesters stormed her palace.

Up to 1,400 people were killed between July and August 2024 when Hasina's government launched a campaign to silence the protesters, according to the United Nations.—AFP

ARGO: Villagers play football on a snow-covered field in Afghanistan's Badakhshan province.—AFP

EU orders probe over Grok's AI images after outcry

BRUSSELS: Elon Musk's X faces investigation by the European Union into whether it disseminates illegal content, following public outcry over the spreading of manipulated sexualised images by its artificial intelligence Grok chatbot.

The European Commission, the 27-nation bloc's executive arm, said on Monday that it would investigate whether social media platform *X* protected consumers by properly assessing and mitigating risks related to Grok's functionalities.

Its probe comes two weeks after British media regulator Ofcom launched its own investigation over concerns Grok was creating sexually intimate deepfake images, and after Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia temporarily blocked the chatbot.

The commission said earlier this month that the AI-generated images of undressed women and children being shared on *X* were unlawful and appalling, joining condemnation across the world.

"Non-consensual sexual deepfakes of women and children are a violent, unacceptable form of degradation," EU tech chief Henna Virkkunen said in a statement.

Images alarm regulators

X referred to a statement issued on Jan 14 in which it said owner xAI had restricted image editing for Grok AI users and blocked users, based on their location, from generating images of people in revealing clothing in "jurisdictions where it's illegal". It did not identify the countries.

The Philippines and Malaysia restored access to Grok after xAI said it had installed extra safety measures.

The commission's move under the EU Digital Services Act, which requires Big Tech to do more to tackle illegal and harmful online content, came after xAI's Grok produced sexualised images of women and minors that alarmed global regulators.

Companies risk fines as much as six per cent of their global annual turnover for DSA breaches.

Although the changes made by xAI were welcome, they do not resolve all the issues and systemic risks, a senior official for the executive said. The commission believed *X* did not carry out an ad hoc assessment when it rolled out Grok's functionalities in Europe, the official added.

EU risks irritating Trump

The investigation risks antagonising the administration of President Donald Trump as an EU crackdown on Big Tech has triggered criticism and even the threat of tariffs.

"With this investigation, we will determine whether *X* has met its legal obligations under the DSA, or whether it treated rights of European citizens, including those of women and children, as collateral damage of its service," Virkkunen said.

European lawmaker Regina Doherty said the case exposed wider weaknesses in how AI technologies are regulated and enforced.

"The AI Act must remain a living piece of legislation. If gaps in enforcement or oversight become clear, then it is our responsibility to address them. EU laws must be enforceable in real time when serious harms occur," she said.

EU regulators also extended an investigation into *X* opened in Dec 2023 to establish whether it has properly assessed and mitigated all systemic risks related to its so-called recommender systems, including the impact of its recently announced switch to a Grok-based system.

They said *X*, which was hit with a 150 million euro fine last month for breaching its transparency obligations under the DSA, may face interim measures in the absence of meaningful adjustments to its service.—Reuters

UNDP relocating NY-based posts outside US

The move is part of an 'ongoing effort to adapt to an evolving financial and development landscape'

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the lead UN agency for international development, is relocating a substantial share of its New York-based posts, and moving them to locations outside the United States.

The UN agency announced on Monday the move is part of an ongoing effort to adapt to an evolving financial and development landscape, strengthen partnerships, and maximize UNDP's ability to support the world's most vulnerable people.

The UNDP operates in some 170 countries and territories with a workforce of approximately 22,000, the vast majority of whom -- more than 19,000 -- serve in country offices and regional hubs, while fewer than 7 percent are based in New York, with the remainder in other locations. New York will remain the UNDP's global headquarters.

The United States has announced its intention to withdraw from a host of UN organisations' programmes and initiatives focusing on a wide range of crucial areas, including climate change crisis, trade, gender and development.

Several of the bodies listed in the White House Memorandum are funded principally or partially by the regular UN budget, implying that voluntary funding will be impacted, although central funding will continue. However, the White House notes that its funding review of international organisations "remains ongoing", and it is currently unclear what the impact of the announcement will be.

The relocation will affect almost 400 posts, with approximately three-quarters of them transferring to Bonn (Germany) and about one quarter to Madrid (Spain). The UNDP's overall footprint in Bonn will now exceed 400 positions as it is already the long-standing home of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, part of the UNDP family, the UNDP says.

Seven killed in Maine plane crash

WASHINGTON: Seven people were killed and one person was seriously injured in the US state of Maine on Sunday when a private jet crashed as it was taking off from an airport in Bangor.

The crash of the twin-engine turbo-fan jet Bombardier Challenger 600 happened at about 7.45pm (0045GMT). The crash occurred in snowy weather and in low visibility conditions.

Bombardier referred questions to the National Transportation Safety Board. The Bangor airport remained closed on Monday.

The company listed as its registered owner shares a Houston address with Arnold & Itkin, a personal injury law firm. Records show the plane went into service in April 2020.—Reuters

World not ready for rise in extreme heat, scientists say

PARIS: Nearly 3.8 billion people could face extreme heat by 2050 and while tropical countries will bear the brunt cooler regions will also need to adapt, scientists said on Monday.

Demand for cooling will "drastically" increase in giant countries like Brazil, Indonesia and Nigeria, where hundreds of millions of people lack airconditioning or other means of beating the heat.

But even a moderate increase in hotter days could have a "severe impact" in nations not used to such conditions like Canada, Russia and Finland, said scientists from the University of Oxford.

In a new study, they looked at different global warming scenarios to project how often people in future might experience temperatures considered uncomfortably hot or cold.

They found "that the population experiencing extreme heat conditions is projected to nearly double" by 2050 if global average temperatures rise 2C above preindustrial times.

But most of the impact would be felt this decade as the world fast approaches the 1.5C mark, the study's lead author Jesus Lizana said.

"The key takeaway from this is that the need for adaptation to extreme heat is more urgent than previously known," said Lizana, an environmental scientist.

"New infrastructure, such as sustainable airconditioning or passive cooling, needs to be built out within the next few years to ensure people can cope with dangerous heat."

Prolonged exposure to extreme heat can overwhelm the body's natural cooling systems, causing symptoms ranging from dizziness and headaches to organ failure and death.

It is called a silent killer because most heat deaths occur gradually as high temperatures and other environmental factors work together to undermine the body's internal thermostat.

Climate change is making heatwaves longer and stronger and access to cooling, especially airconditioning, will be vital in future.

Dangerously underprepared

The study, published in the journal *Nature Sustainability*, projected that 3.79 billion people worldwide could be exposed to extreme heat by mid century.

This would "drastically" increase energy demand for cooling in developing nations where the gravest health consequences would be felt. India, the Philippines and Bangladesh would be among biggest populations impacted.

The most significant change in "cooling degree days" - temperatures hot enough to require cooling, such as airconditioning or fans - were projected in tropical or equatorial countries, particularly in Africa.

Central African Republic, Nigeria, South Sudan, Laos and Brazil saw the biggest rise in dangerously hot temperatures.

"Put simply, the most disadvantaged people are the ones who will bare the brunt of this trend our study shows for ever hotter days," climate scientist Radhika Khosla said.

But wealthier countries in traditionally cooler climates also "face a major a problem - even if many do not realise it yet", she added.—AFP

NEWSMAKERS

DOHA: Pigeons fly across the Corniche area on a cloudy day in the Qatari capital.—AFP

ITUREN: Bellringers, with big cowbells hanging on their backs, march during a carnival in the northern Spanish province of Navarre.—AFP

HAMBURG: (From left) Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Belgium's Prime Minister Bart de Wever address a press conference after they signed a declaration during a summit of North Sea countries.—AFP

A SERBIAN driver walks between trucks at a border crossing between Serbia and Croatia. The truck drivers are demanding changes to the European Union visa system that restricts their time in the EU.—AFP

Truckers block Balkan borders over EU travel rules

BATROVCI: Hundreds of truck drivers began blockading freight border crossings across several Balkan countries on Monday, demanding changes to the European Union visa system that restricts their time in the bloc.

Dozens of goods checkpoints in Bosnia, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia were being targeted as part of a coordinated effort by trucking unions that could last up to a week.

"You are punishing, deporting and causing damage to the entire European economy," Nedjo Mandic from the Association of Transport Operators of Serbia said of officials enforcing EU travel rules.

He was speaking at Batrovci, a major border checkpoint with EU-member Croatia.

By shortly after noon, a line of lorries stretched back hundreds of metres had built up on the Serbian side of the border.

Mandic said similar scenes were unfolding at almost all EU borders with the Western Balkans.

Since October, the EU has started rolling out its long-delayed entry/exit system (EES) at borders around the 27-nation bloc.

The scheme aims to end the use of passport stamps and digitise visitor registration.

Although the limit on staying in the EU is not new, the electronic EES system will mean more rigorous enforcement of a 90-day limit every 180 days for non-EU citizens.

That would make long-haul trucking from the Balkans "unsustainable", Mandic said.— AFP

NUUK: A soldier mans a checkpoint at a harbour in Greenland where two Danish navy patrol vessels are moored. Denmark deployed a warship and several gunboats in Greenland last week to exercise its sovereignty after threats by US President to take over the Arctic territory.—AFP

BEIRUT: Lebanese President Joseph Aoun (right) shakes hands with Qatari Minister of State Mohammed Bin Abdulaziz before their meeting at the Presidential Palace.—AFP